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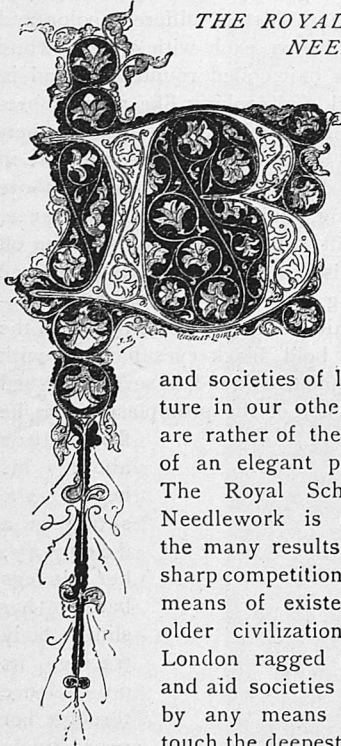
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ART NEEDLEWORK

THE ROYAL SCHOOL OF ART NEEDLEWORK.



UT few Americans have a correct idea of the conditions out of which the South Kensington School of Needlework was developed. The Society of Decorative Art in New York

and societies of like nature in our other cities are rather of the nature of an elegant pastime. The Royal School of Needlework is one of the many results of the sharp competition for the means of existence in older civilizations. In London ragged schools and aid societies do not by any means always touch the deepest suffering

or the most pressing necessities. On the contrary, a certain delicacy of feeling accompanies other forms of privation, and in that proportion prevents its alleviation by its concealment. This is the case with the class whose existence is the "*raison d'être*" of the Royal School of Needlework. The school is but twelve years old and is under the immediate patronage of the Queen. It is designed exclusively for the benefit of ladies, in the English sense of the word, who are forced to earn their incomes wholly or in part. And it is so ordered that this may be done without exposing their needs or in any way wounding the feelings which are kept keenly susceptible by the peculiar construction of English society.

Americans, who consider these matters with greater indifference, and from another point of view, find it somewhat difficult to understand why the artistic value of the work does not count for more in the eyes of those who engage in it and give to their labors a dignity which would lessen or remove the need for secrecy. Work which calls for such designers as William Morris, Val Prinsep, Walter Crane, Mark Fisher, and Sir Frederick Leighton, all of whom furnish designs for the South Kensington School, ought to be capable of bestowing honor on those who execute it. Certainly, pride in one's labor greatly sweetens its necessity. So much the Royal School of Needlework foregoes. Its operations, so far as the work-room is concerned, are conducted with great privacy. Its classes are occupied in preparing its workwomen. Afterward they are simply employed. The society furnishes the materials and designs. The work is executed chiefly at the school, the workwomen being employed and paid for their work. Then their responsibility ceases. The articles belong to the society, and they undertake the sale.

The first impression upon entering the society's show-rooms is of what appears to be the infinite fancy and ingenuity which has devised so many different

and differently adorned articles. After a time, however, one perceives the "*cachet*" of South Kensington which, however many the forms, distinguishes all. The word school has a larger meaning than is implied by classes for instruction. In color, design, and handiwork the tendency of the training has a definite direction, and however it is varied within certain limits, those limits are plainly defined.

All the work issuing from the South Kensington School is conventional and decorative, as distinguished from the more realistic effects attempted in America, of which the works of Mrs. Wheeler and Miss Townsend are conspicuous examples. This

how original are the motives in its designs, the designs themselves are strictly conventional. The treatment suggests principally three influences—those of mediæval, Renaissance, and Japanese art.

The South Kensington stitch, as it is known in the United States, is only the varied use of the stem-stitch, which is common to the embroideries of all nations. The embroidery of the show-rooms, where are seen the most exquisite specimens of needlework, includes all the usual stitches known to embroiderers, but none of those daring innovations which are used with us in producing novel effects. In fact, there is no piece shown which might not be examined under a microscope, so closely do the stitches conform to rules. The result is that while the work never falls below a certain standard of excellence, while it is always in good taste, it is in a certain way limited.

What are understood as antique tints are almost exclusively used. Antique tints are simply the result of time and the action of the air on colors which we would not call antique. The needlewoman who wrought the textures from which these were copied we know did not use such colors. But she was an artist, and there is at least safety, if limitation, in copying her work. The finest pieces of color, however, at the Royal School are in different tints of the same hue, using a ground of the deepest shade as the starting point.

The materials used do not differ from those employed in American decorative establishments. The handsomest stuff and also that in most frequent use is plush. Satin sheetings are very popular and are produced in beautiful tints. Linen and crash come next in favor; the latter is united with the most expensive stuffs. One of the show pieces is a large coverlet of maroon plush in which is inserted, as a border, a band of crash worked in old Dutch stitch with red silk and added to the band of plush which encloses it is an ornamental fringe of silk and linen thread. These coverlets are a feature of the show-rooms. One of yellow silk displayed a border of purple grapes and foliage done in appliqué, which was gorgeous, but by no means gaudy. Another in blue plush had a decoration of golden oranges, in which the texture of the fruit was given in knot-stitch.

Two extremely handsome screens in mediæval floral designs were superbly mounted in carved wood. In one the design included a cock, done in the manner of the peacock which the Decorative Art Society of New York brought over, with trailing vines and groups of flowers, such as are seen in foregrounds of Perugini's and Raphael's earlier works. The other, which was three-leaved, had on each leaf of dark blue green satin a flower-pot with a tall bush of roses, white, red, and yellow. The drawing of these flowers, as well as their color and execution, was something superb.

The most striking floral designs were those in outline, in which the flowers and leaves made a continuous pattern, especially suitable for borders, and

which covered the ground—that is to say, the spaces between the lines were about a quarter of an inch apart, never more nor less. It may be remarked in



APPLIQUÉ EMBROIDERY. ITALIAN RENAISSANCE.

school, in fact, may be said to have re-issued certain canons on this subject, of which so much has been said in the discussions on decorative art. No matter

passing that the making of such designs from nature must be valuable and profitable. The flowers used in those shown were always those with long leaves, which could be made without restraint to follow certain curves. Other designs especially worth mentioning were taken from Renaissance garlands. These are so elegant embroidered on rich materials that it is strange they have not been more used in embroideries intended for drawing-rooms.

In delicacy and beauty the finger-bowl doilies exhibited cannot be exceeded. They were shown in sets through which one idea was carried out, but varied in each piece. One set was dedicated to childhood. A cherubic infant lay in a shell; about him were sea-weed, a crab, and fish swimming. Again, he lay cuddled under a mushroom fast asleep. In another, cradled on a tree-bough, he was talking with a bird. Again, he was discoursing with a mouse running up a stalk of wheat. A goose coming out of a pond made him run. He climbed out of a pod after his morning nap. He held converse with a stork, the latter, of course, on one leg; and again lying on the ground he watched a spider weave his web. These designs were full of graceful fancy. The child was beautifully drawn, and all the artistic requirements were duly observed. Another set of doilies was adorned with birds, fans, autumn leaves, fish, shells, scattered regularly over the ground. These were done, like the others, in the finest outline stitch, in various colored silks.

Probably the strongest impression in walking through these rooms is of the marvellous ingenuity of the feminine mind. Here are embroideries for every purpose. The most elaborate of these are the book-covers, in which might fitly lie the most costly editions de luxe. Conspicuous was a large volume bound in dark red velvet and ornamented with a wreath in light red outlined in gold. Another was of rich brown velvet with a branch of pines in gold. Music rolls, picture frames, photograph cases, paper pads, blotters, receive the most luxurious treatment. One of the most striking and convenient articles designed for the English household is the gilded wire paper rack intended to stand on a table. This is adorned with rich lambrequins decorated with white dogwood or with daises in appliqué of white plush.

A humbler but no less useful article is a wooden box at least four feet long and proportionately wide and deep. Its shape suggests its being conveniently tucked away in a window seat. It has a lid, and it is covered with stout linen crash, previously ornamented by dividing it into panels by means of two bars in outline stitch in heavy dark red linen. In each panel is a design in outline stitch. These designs include girls playing a harp and singing, girls playing the violin and a lyre wreathed in flowers with the word "music." The box inside is divided into compartments, and is, in fact, a receptacle for accumulated music. Space fails to even enumerate the many interesting things to be found in these rooms, which are among the show places of importance to the feminine mind in London. The remoter influence of the Royal School of Art Needlework has been widely felt. Its scholars have come to America and introduced its methods, and to it much that has been done in this country is directly due.

MARY GAY HUMPHREYS.

EMBROIDERY HINTS.

ONE of the prettiest rooms in this city, done by one of the most prominent decorators, has both the wall hangings and furniture embroidered. The wall hangings are of a peculiarly charming red velours, rather light in tint and yet soft, and changing color as the light plays in the deep pile. This is stamped with a light, graceful Venetian all-over design, and the lines traced with gold and silver threads couched down. The stuff is managed much the same as a quilt,

although it cannot be rolled. The breadths are put separately in quilting frames, and each is finished before it is removed. Of course the stamping must be done with reference to the perfect joining of the breadths. This work will especially suit those who like to combine sociability with occupation. Couching parties may be given, and after work at the frames and cheerful conversation, the more substantial rewards of hospitality accompanied by gentlemen to supper may follow.

To return to the room in question. The furniture, consisting of six pieces, is charmingly embroidered. The largest is a small sofa covered with brown velours with some yellow in its tone. On the back is a wreath, based on two parallel lines an inch apart, consisting of brown and gold cord couched down. Around this wreath are clusters of flowers primrose shaped, that is, open petalled with centres. They do



EMBROIDERED LECTERN HANGING.

not profess to imitate nature, but are embroidered in different colors in silk. Usually two or three are different tints of the same color, and then two are of different colors, giving a sort of accent to the group. There are five of these clusters, the foliage of which connects them lightly together. On the seat are clusters of flowers grouped and composed in color in the same way. But this must not be understood as including the wreath arrangement. On the contrary, they are apparently strewn at random, but, in fact, are admirably balanced. Some of the chairs are in a reseda velours, and there is much pale pink and blue in the embroidery. One is in the tint of the wall, displaying much gold. The handsomest chair is of creamy white satin, the back having for its ornament an elaborate gold wreath of leaves with large flowers in pale pinks. There is also a double pillow-cushion ottoman, the lower pillow of reseda plush, the upper

of white satin with an embroidered gold wreath. In all this embroidery there is nothing that any woman skilled with her needle might not do. The most important thing about such work is to choose a pretty design and to get artistic coloring.

The lightest of India and China crape silks in cool refreshing tints of pink, blue and yellow are used as curtains for cabinets and book-shelves, glass doors in artistic furniture being carefully eschewed. The most desirable book-shelves are those that are set up directly against the wall without any backs. These are usually made to order, and the shelves are irregularly placed and now and then omitted in part to give a larger receptacle. No matter how cheap the wood leather scollops fastened down with brass nails hide the edges of the shelves, and brass moldings the up-rights. These shelves often cover the width of a room. The upper shelf is for bric-à-brac. One or two rows hold porcelains. A brass rod keeps the plates upright. The cups swing from brass hooks. In an other division is glass. Another holds books. Over a larger space hangs one of these delicate curtains of silk. All this breaks up the wall surface, and each part makes a varied decoration. The designs on these curtains are in outline stitch, and consist of overlapping disks or daisy wheels, that is to say, circles with inner curves taken from the idea of daisy petals, mathematically exact. Any simple design strewn over the surface is suitable. There can be nothing prettier than an irregular cloud-like grouping of small rings such as is seen in some Japanese papers. These are usually in two colors—that is, each group is confined to one color, although different tints of the same color are always advisable since, without being conspicuous they prevent the effect from becoming monotonous. These dainty curtains can be hung in small windows or over lower sashes as well as to screen and ornament cabinets and shelves. Pongee, it should be added, is admirable for the same purpose and is ornamented in the same way.

Pongee tidies are made of straight pieces of stuff, oblong in shape. Across the bottom is a band the outlines of which are worked in button-hole stitch. After the lines are all filled in the material is cut out and the work has the appearance of guipure. The silk gauze used for bolting cloth has a frame of iron-like strength and makes beautiful tidies for silk and satin chair-backs since, while showing its own beauty, it does not conceal that of the stuff underneath. These are usually worked in colors and in silk and gold thread. Only the lower edge is embroidered.

Apropos of the velours hangings mentioned it may be remarked that velours seems to have in great measure taken the place of plush in handsome embroideries, being quite as rich in effect and a cheaper material. There are two kinds, silk and mohair velours; the former is extremely pliable and of course the handsomer. Sofa-pillows of velours are made in the shape of a bag gathered up toward the mouth, after the manner of bags, and tied with wide-spreading ribbon bows. Such a pillow of rich blue velours is embroidered diagonally beneath the tied part in a wide stripe. This embroidery is in silk and arrasene. Small overlapping disks contain embroidered flowers. The ground is broken by irregular lines, which make an apparently continuous series. These are worked in couchings of heavy arrasene. Very pretty photograph covers, portfolio covers, and mouchoir cases are made of velours with conventional ornament of arrasene couched in basket fashion over gold stuff appliqué beneath. It is well worth while for the embroiderer who wishes to produce novel effects to study the various fashions of couching, of which none are prettier than that which counterfeits the waving of rushes. As has been noted, magnificent hangings, also, are made of this velours. Some now preparing for a Chicago residence are dull red. Between double rows of couching of gold thread is a Renaissance appliqué ornament of white velours.